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Labour is no alternative

THERE CAN be no doubt that Thatcher and the Tory government are deeply unpopular. In one opinion poll after another, and on issues as diverse as top rate income tax cuts, privatisation, *Spy Catcher* and the NHS, the government fails to command a majority. The by-elections at Pontypridd and Richmond are proof of this. The Tories held Richmond with a greatly reduced majority and only 37.2% of the votes; in Pontypridd their vote tumbled and they were forced into a poor third place.

In spite of this there is little chance that the Tories will lose the next general election. The 'sensible' centre parties have – for the moment anyway – been completely marginalised by their Tweedledum, Tweedledee squabbling. As to the Labour Party, it has hardly reasserted itself as the alternative party of government. At Richmond it lost its deposit, while in the traditional stronghold of Pontypridd its vote declined by some 3% as a percentage of the total and 6,000 in absolute terms. The mid term Tories have more to smile about than Kinnock.

Kinnock's response to Labour's poor performance is to shift further to the right in order to capture the fluid centre ground. In this project of Thatcherising the Labour Party, Kinnock has little to fear from the left. It will kick up a hue and cry. But in the end it will loyally do what it is told and work for a Labour victory, no matter how much Kinnock insults, blames and humiliates it. Labour leftism is a classic example of masochistic politics.

Take nuclear weapons. This shows just how far and how fast Kinnock is moving to the right. During the last general election the CNDer Kinnock promised to decommission Polaris within two weeks and said he could never bring himself to press the button. This 'peacemonger' has changed his tune. Early last month, to the surprise of his colleagues, he unilaterally announced that unilateral nuclear disarmament was no longer Labour policy.

This is only the latest in a long line of policy 'adjustments'. Since the coming together of the 'nightmare ticket' the Kinnock/Hattersley Labour Party has turned away from nationalisation, ie what it calls 'socialism', and all that goes with it, towards Thatcher's market capitalism, and all that goes with that, yuppies, share ownership and all.

Clearly Thatcher has set Kinnock's agenda. As a result the Labour left has seen its 'great victories' of yesteryear – opposition to the European Community, planning and state control, scrapping nuclear weapons and renationalisation etc – go down like so many skittles to Thatcherism.

For communists these developments have to be seen in the light

of what the Labour Party is, ie a *bourgeois workers' party*. In other words a party fully and irredeemably committed to the interests of British imperialism but resting on a working class base in terms of both votes and the organisations of the trade union movement.

Kinnock is the representative of the right of the working class movement, specifically the trade union and labour bureaucracy, which fully accepts the logic of capitalism and seeks to act as the left wing of the *British state*.

Because, in a bourgeois society, bourgeois ideas are the ruling ideas, Labour is able to command mass support, even from the most militant and anti-capitalist sections of the working class (indeed this section is at present the bedrock of Labourism). Yet precisely because Labour is a bourgeois *workers' party* this involves all sorts of contradictions and results in a state of *permanent civil war* inside Labourism.

The question arises as to why it does not simply collapse under the weight of its own internal contradictions? Why, with its record in office and opposition, its strike breaking, its cowardice, its support for imperialist war and slaughter from World War I to the Falklands, is the Labour Party able to retain its mass base?

The reason is, of course, *the left*. In fact the relationship of left and right in such a party is *symbiotic* rather than ultimately antagonistic; there is an *organic* division of labour between them that corresponds to the different needs of the party.

The right's 'democratic socialist' philosophy is neither democratic nor socialist. It makes little attempt to hide the fact that it is openly pro-capitalist/pro-imperialist. The right recognises that its policies are there to serve the interests of British imperialism. On the other hand the left presents a radical picture of a 'socialist' Britain, ie a social democratic state capitalism with high welfare spending. Hope of achieving this is what cements Labour's traditional base, the working class, to the party as a whole.

This understanding puts the seemingly interminable see-sawing between left and right in the Labour Party into its correct context: see-saws, after all, need two people on opposite ends in order to work.

While the Labour right always remains, in the last analysis, in control, in times of particularly acute crisis it allows the left wing to see-saw up. In the wake of the October Revolution and the post World War I upsurge in strike action, it agreed to Clause Four. After the defection of its leader, MacDonald, in 1931, it replaced him with the left winger Lansbury. And in the aftermath of the mass-

ive demoralisation within its own ranks with the viciously anti-working class attacks of the Wilson/Clegg government of the late 1970s, Labour's grandees had every reason to be seen to again tip their party to the left. If policy sops were not given they faced the prospect of mass defection and the possible creation of a significant left alternative. There was, of course, a price to pay: the SDP. Nevertheless the party survived.

However, nothing stands still in politics, and the see-sawing civil war within Labourism continues. The right must now firmly reassert itself. If it is to be electable Kinnock must present his party to the ruling class as a credible and safe alternative government which would administer capitalism just like the Tories. This entails tipping the party back down to the right and taking on the Labour left, taming it, blaming it and purging it.

Kinnock may cite Gorbachev's 'new political thinking' to justify his personal *volte face* on nuclear weapons, but this just won't wash. Why should Kinnock junk unilateralism just when Gorbachev has started to practice it?

Imperialism has had its appetite wetted by the compromises and betrayals of Gorbachev: nothing more. A greatly weakened Soviet Union is far easier to bully and threaten into conceding more and more, until the very existence of living socialism is threatened.

Thus the imperialist powers are determined to ratchet up the arms race; to constantly shift the goalposts to ensure the USSR will be cowed by overwhelmingly superior forces. For that they need nuclear weapons.

Kinnock's unceremonious dumping of Labour unilateralism thus illustrates not only that the man is a despicable opportunist but that like every other leader Labour has ever had, he is compelled by the very nature of bourgeois parliamentary politics to adapt to the interests of British imperialism, which are of course diametrically opposed to those of the working class and the cause of world peace.

Kinnock is obviously looking for bourgeois respectability and office ... but how? As things stand, Labour by itself has little chance of beating the Tories. But what if Dr David Owen made an Enoch Powell type call to vote Labour where there is no SDP candidate? If this were combined with SLD support in a hung parliament it might just get him into No10. It is these straws that Kinnock is trying to clutch.

Labour's commitment to unilateralism has always been cited by the centre parties as the main obstacle which prevents them from trusting Kinnock with office. But as Peter Kellner notes in the *Independent* of February 20:

"Things have changed. Labour's

new defence policy is likely to: reaffirm the party's commitment to Nato, seek to negotiate away Britain's nuclear weapons as part of the international disarmament process, advocate a central Europe battlefield-nuclear-weapon-free-zone, and urge Nato to end its dependence on the first use of nuclear weapons. Does that list sound familiar? It should. It is a summary of the Alliance's defence policy in 1987."

It is simply too glib to put this summersault down to a failure to judge popular opinion, as Tony Benn does. His 'your getting it wrong Neil' approach is echoed by many sections of the revolutionary left. For example, the February 18 edition of *Socialist Worker* foolishly dubs the Kinnock abandonment of unilateralism as 'illogical'.

Not to understand that for the leader of a *bourgeois workers' party* it is perfectly logical to dump the left's sacred cows, including unilateralism, is worse than stupid. It is to foster the illusion that the Labour Party can be anything *other* than a bourgeois workers' party.

Kinnock's abject capitulation to the interests of capital will of course provoke mutterings both from the Labour left and from those, like the SWP, who have the interests of the Labour Party at heart. That is why *Socialist Worker* articles on the Labour Party consistently take the form of giving Kinnock friendly advice.

"This kind of talk can only benefit the Tories" the paper lectured him (February 18); "How not to get members", the rabidly anti-Soviet Trotskyites of *Socialist Organiser* told him (February 9); *Militant* likewise ticked Kinnock off for: "Allowing the Tory media to set Labour's policy agenda".

Good advice on how to get himself firmly ensconced in Downing Street seems to be raining down on the head of the Ginger Pig from those who, formally, are supposed to be his irreconcilable enemies.

On one level, these leftist advisers have a point. Labour's political givings are unlikely to improve the standing of Kinnock in the polls. But far from things being changed by Kinnock adopting their left reformist nostrums, as a party of crisis Labour's only real hope lies in playing the parliamentary game, adopting policies that are fully in line with the interests of capital and hoping that the Tories will fall foul of some major crisis.

The Tory Party is the ruling classes' preferred party of government. There is also now a dominant, one party system, the two party swings and roundabouts system is a thing of the past. Thatcher's government is threatened more from internal divisions than from any of its parliamentary opponents: as the *Financial Times*

commented recently "the British government would be in trouble ... if it had an opposition."

A domestic or international disaster like a Profumo or a Suez might lead to the replacement of Thatcher, but for the dominant sections of the ruling class to want a Labour government would require divisions within the ranks of the bourgeoisie in the face of a major upsurge in working class action.

So for communists it is not a question of Labour or the centre parties getting their acts together, calling for electoral pacts let alone reversing the 'betrayals' of Kinnock, but fighting no matter what for the Communist Party our class needs.

The reformist and pro-Labour revolutionary left alike remain mesmerised and trapped by Labourism. Instead of organising to fight the Tory government it fights to turn back the wheels of history and restore the Labour Party as the alternative party of government; as if this represented the key to social progress.

Labour is the 'second team' of British imperialism, which can be brought in to fulfill the same role of the two pre-World War II Labour governments, to do what the Tories and Liberals couldn't: defuse and disorientate working class resistance in order to reassert capitalist stability and maybe impose deeply unpopular austerity measures.

Labour leftists will, if pressed, admit this. Yet so lacking are they in political confidence that they cling on to the Labour Party as if it were a life raft. Many such militants found themselves drawn into this treacherous party in the early 1980s because of the rise of the 'Bennite' phenomenon.

Dreams of transforming the Labour Party have been turned to dross by the cancerous spread of so-called new realism. Whole swathes of former leftists have themselves gone down to it. And far from finding the working class inside the Labour Party, the experience of most militants is of endless and ultimately pointless committee room manoeuvring.

There are no short cuts to socialism. The Labour Party has proved to be a disastrous *cul-de-sac* for some, a grave for others. It's time for all honest working class partisans in the Labour Party to seriously consider their political perspective. The next conference, the next election, winning through the unions, taking the constituencies are a road to nowhere.

Comrades, there is only one path to socialism, and that is the path of Leninism. We must build a genuine Communist Party as an alternative, not only to the Tories, but Labourism. There is no alternative if we want to see socialism in our country.

Ian Mahoney



MARCH 8, International Women's Day, is claimed by the feminist movement as its own. Like many dates in the working class calendar, it has been given away by opportunists to alien forces. May Day, but for the efforts of Leninists, would have suffered the same fate and been handed over to the grey bureaucrats of the official labour movement.

The feminist movement in Britain today is based on a convergence of middle class women and Labourism. It is an ideology which sees men, not capitalism, as the problem. Consequently, feminism looks to the capitalist state, especially its local Labourite appendages, to resolve women's problems.

The feminist women-only events which now characterise International Women's Day in Britain are a million miles from its implacably revolutionary proletarian origins. The revolutionary wing of the workers movement has, while championing women's rights, always fought feminism. It was this section of the working class which initiated International Working Women's Day on March 8 1911. It was organised by the International Women's Socialist Organisation, by one of its leading figures, the German revolutionary Clara Zetkin, who went on to play a prominent part in the Communist International.

The event was inspired by a demonstration on March 8 1908 by women machinists demanding improved working conditions and the right to vote. The demonstration was also directed against the bourgeois women's suffrage movement, which did not support working class votes or struggles. In resolving that March 8 should be International Working Women's Day, the IWSO stated: "socialist women must not ally themselves with bourgeois feminists, but lead the battle side by side with socialist men."

This stance was supported by the Bolsheviks. Unlike the Mensheviks, who wanted women-only cross-class demonstrations, the Bolsheviks fought for working-class demonstrations of both women and men demanding women's rights on a proletarian basis.

It was the class action of Russian working class women which triggered the February Revolution in 1917. Later, the Comintern was to prioritise agitation among working class women on just this basis.

The Menshevik attitude, just like our modern day Labourites and 'socialist' feminists, only demobilises the fight against women's oppression by directing it at the wrong target and tying it to bourgeois women. Neither can it challenge sexism among male workers. Instead of fighting to mobilise them in support of women's rights, it poses women's oppression as a purely women's problem which can only be resolved by women of all classes in isolation from men.

It is not: it is a problem for the entire working class, one that can only be successfully challenged by the united offensive of the working class.

Over the last decade attacks on women's rights have increased. There is a constant moral and legislative barrage directed against already limited abortion rights. Working class women labour under much lower wage rates and are proportionally less represented in trade unions than men. Many are shamelessly ripped off through part time and home work. On top of this women are oppressed by the structures of the family.

All the 'socialist' feminists have to offer against this are sops; women's committees on local councils, for instance. Coupled with this you have the retreat into mystical deification of motherhood by radical feminists. Clearly the feminist movement is bankrupt. It does not offer a fighting programme for women's liberation ... only diversions.

The liberation of women necessitates the abolition of the division of labour, the family and classes - *communism*. Communists fight unequivocally for women's liberation and a revolutionary platform for working class women in the struggle for the first step towards that - working class state power. That was the original intent of International Working Women's Day. Let us reclaim our day.

Deputy Editor

Six month subscription rates: Britain and Ireland £5; Europe £8; Rest of World £10 (airmail £17.50). Annual subscription rates: Britain and Ireland £10, Institutions £20; Europe £16, Institutions £26; Rest of World £20 (airmail £35), Institutions £30 (airmail £45). Back copies: Issues 1-6 (theoretical journal) £1 each plus 25p p&p. All cheques payable to November Publications Ltd. Printed by: Morning Litho Printers Ltd. (T.U.), Unit 5 St Marks Industrial Est., 439 North Woolwich Road, London E16 2BS. Published by: November Publications, BCM Box 928, London copyright March 1989 ISSN 0262-1649

LETTERS

Exclusion

Your news of the arrest of Belfast IRSP's Eamonn Mullen under the PTA and his subsequent exclusion from the mainland comes as a major blow. His unshakeable commitment to the national struggle and to revolutionary communism, his internationalism and his clear, sound ideological base are an example to us all. Eamonn's presence on the mainland will be most sorely missed.

His exclusion will deny us all the much needed opportunity of hearing about the Irish struggle and the real atrocities committed by the British state. It is clear that all voices of opposition to the British state's presence and actions in Ireland are being brutally crushed. Its bankruptcy is shown in many ways, not least in the assertion that Northern Ireland is part of Britain while enacting powers to exclude 'British' citizens from parts of Britain.

The majority of people on the mainland are sadly ignorant and wholly misinformed about the Irish situation and the state powers in force. People must recognise laws such as the PTA for what they are - the brutal repression of opposition to the British state and the censorship of British atrocities in Northern Ireland.

It is therefore heartening that *The Leninist* gives such prominence and support to the national struggle and the courage and commitment of those like Eamonn.

Sue Arnold
London

Ireland under bourgeois rule would further the proletarian cause. The Irish national question can only be resolved under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

John Cable
Essex

'civilians' and the IRA announced the disbandment of an active service unit for similar reasons. Perhaps this legitimises what I have been trying to put across. You are out of step on this occasion.

Roy West
Bishop Stortford

Eulogise

Recently I have been reading the articles by Jack Conrad (*The Leninist* Nos 72 and 74) and also the speech by our Turkish comrade. These articles were enjoyable in the sense that no Communist Party publication or the *Morning Star* carry anything comparable.

However, I have some reservations/criticisms. First, I am not at all happy with the way Jack Conrad in the article 'Forging the weapon' eulogies Joseph Stalin. Yes, there was great progress of sorts under Stalin, but was that not why they had the revolution in the first place? Was this not the task of the party leader anyway?

Any progress that was made under Stalin was made with a great loss of human dignity and human life. Whole villages were forcibly transferred to other areas and many ethnic minorities (such as the Tatars and Jews) were uprooted and transferred 1,000s of miles. Many of the virgin lands were developed with slave labour.

In respect to Turkey, your analysis may be correct, this I cannot judge. But the attacks on the new United Communist Party of Turkey are hard to agree with. There is no word by yourselves about the two leaders in jail, or their trial and interrogation or about the trade union leaders who flew to Turkey and was then refused entrance. Do you not support the campaign to 'free' these political prisoners or are we now succumbing to sectarianism of the worst kind?

Roy Walker
Essex

David Sherriff replies: For reasons known only to him our friend Roy Walker insists on writing to us letters made up of the latest attacks on us emanating from the Trotskyite paper *Workers Hammer*. What is actually written in *The Leninist* seems to have no impact on him.

1. There is no way that Jack Conrad "eulogised" Joseph Stalin. He stated that in comparison to Stalin, Gorbachev is a pigmy. Walker can dispute this ... but what he should not do is set up Aunt Sallies. 2. On Turkey, again Walker is determined to misrepresent our position: "Do we support the campaign to free the Sargin and Kutlu he asks". No we do not support the campaign to turn these two traitors into martyrs. But as we have stated in every article dealing with this question we support the struggle to free all Turkey's political prisoners. Walker is either being dishonest or stupid.

Note: Letters have been shortened due to lack of space. For political security we have changed certain names, addresses and details.

WRITE OR RING

If you would like to reply to any of these letters, raise questions or comment on articles in *The Leninist* please write to The Editor, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX. Or phone us on 01-431 3135.

Unfounded allegations



'Disciplined, organised and militant'?

This is a letter, dated February 16 1989, received from the Committee for British Withdrawal from Ireland

At this year's Bloody Sunday demonstration once again thousands of people took to the streets of Britain, commemorating the murder of 14 civilians by the British Army 17 years ago, and calling for British withdrawal from Ireland. This demonstration is both an act of solidarity by people in this country and, like the annual demonstration in Derry, a reminder to the world of the true nature of the British state and its oppression of the Irish people.

The committee responsible for organising this demonstration has received complaints about the way your organisation behaved on the day and we are asking for your response to these complaints. We do so knowing that it is not in the interests of all those who genuinely support this demonstration to see it disrupted. The specific complaints were:

- That *The Leninist* contingent, as did others, ignored repeated requests from stewards to line up in their own sections. This delayed the start of the march.
- On the march itself, the relatively small *Leninist* contingent was stretched out to such an extent that it constituted a weak point, exposing the march as a whole to the risk of being split by fascist or police attack.
- *The Leninist*'s main steward – identifiable in the rain by sunglasses and a beret – seemed unable or unwilling to respond in any way to the repeated requests from the march stewards.

Whilst your own group may have a number of political differences with other organisations on the march, this should not prevent all these groups marching together in a disciplined, organised and militant manner to commemorate Bloody Sunday and calling for a British withdrawal from Ireland. If that is your aim we are sure you will give due weight to the importance of cooperation in preventing disruption and achieving this.

M Donoghue

For and on behalf of CBWI

Copies to: the secretaries Irish in Britain Representation Group, Troops out movement, Labour Committee on Ireland, Women in Ireland network, Wolfe Tone Society, Labour Women for Ireland, Labour Party Irish sections, British desk Sinn Fein.

Alan Merrik replies:

We are also only too pleased to clarify the situation with regard to our contingent on January's Bloody Sunday demonstration.

• It is not the case that we 'ignored' the instructions to line up in our 'own' section (wherever that was). It is true that our section of the march was urged via megaphone to move backwards by the organisers' stewards. But given the fact that the SWP behind us did not, or could not, move back, nor presumably those behind them, *The Leninist* contingent found it impossible to shuffle back more than a few feet. If you are out to attribute blame for this you must look to yourselves. Why are you scapegoating us?

• Our contingent was lined up and ready to march off on time. That we were delayed for over an hour was hardly our fault. It was your inability to get your act together that should be criticised. It was not a question of bloody mindedness on our behalf, but your poor logistics. Indeed we have heard that your organisers were responsible for delaying the march because they were waiting for Ken Livingstone to arrive. Is this true?

• Our contingent was not a 'weak point' of the march. It – unlike virtually every other – was organised so that our comrades marched in ranks in a 'disciplined, organised

and militant fashion'. It did so from when we at last set off and it maintained its order and barrage of militant slogans through the duration of the march. How we organise our comrades has been designed to achieve this result. That, coupled with weekly karate training has ensured that our contingents are secure and when necessary, combative. What other organisation on the British left can say the same?

• One point in your last 'specific complaint' gives us particular cause for concern: no member of *The Leninist* contingent, let alone the chief steward, wore sunglasses and a beret. Why – given that in these circumstances such dress has obvious connotations with the IRA – has this been invented? We would sincerely hope that this is not some cynical attempt to brand our organisation as a bunch of troublemakers. To make our politics clear we do not find it of any benefit to affect the dress of Irish freedom fighters.

The Leninist contingent, for its size, was probably the most disciplined, organised and militant on the march. Why, then, have we attracted the attention of the march organisers in this way? Is it our vociferous and principled opposition to the platform of 'Time to Go' and our support for the *Hands off Ireland!* campaign to

build a mass anti-imperialist contingent on the march in August, around the demands of 'Troops Out Now!' and 'Self determination for the Irish people as a whole?' that has got your backs up? If so, then you should honestly say so, then these issues can be debated in the open.

By leveling unfounded charges of disruption against *The Leninist* you assist no one, least of all the heroic fighters for national liberation in Ireland.

There are political differences between us. You put your hopes in the Labour Party – a party whose leaders sent the troops into Ireland in August 1969 in a vain attempt to crush the republican masses, a party which has since then consistently and undeviatingly supported imperialism's terroristic war in Ireland. Fully in the spirit of our Communist Party of Great Britain during the Tan War we seek to expose the Labourite traitors and deliver real solidarity to those gallantly fighting for national liberation in Ireland.

These differences will never be used by us in order to prevent joint work with an organisation such as yours. In order to facilitate unity in action we trust that you will withdraw the unprincipled and unfounded accusations leveled against our organisation and its contingent on Bloody Sunday.

The Morning Star has attacked *Marxism Today* for publishing interviews with the likes of Michael Heseltine, Edwina Currie and other newsworthy Tories. On February 23 the *Morning Star* rightly hauled *MT* over the coals for giving a sympathetic write-up to Kenneth Clarke. Yet in the *Morning Star* of February 17 Tory MP John Biffen – former leader of the House of Commons – got a two page interview with its deputy editor, John Bleavin, to parade his reactionary Tory ideas. The two Johns had little trouble finding common ground: "The Soviet Union is visibly less committed to a global position and that is very much to be encouraged" says Biffen. Bleavin seems to agree. Ditto when the former declares that "investing in the USSR is also good business." When Biffen applauds the decline in the international influence of socialism, the *Morning Star* cheers him on. When he describes how the Soviet Union is moving towards capitalism the *Star* does not object. Providing a platform for reactionaries is nothing new for 'official communists'. We remember its international house journal *World Marxist Review* printing a piece last year by Henry Kissinger, the man who wanted to 'bomb Vietnam back to the stone age'. We also note that back in 1987, the *Morning Star* interviewed Gusty Spence, the leader of a UVF murder gang.

This year's London May Day

demonstration will again be an important test of the workers' movement. Last year, the very concept of having a May Day march came under sustained attack from the Communist Campaign Group influenced South East Region TUC via their London May Day Committee. Only the intervention of militant Turkish workers' organisations sympathetic to the Communist Party of Turkey and the South African Congress of Trades Unions stopped this sellout. But instead of reaching out to all sections of the working class that had been and were in struggle, agitating to build a fighting unity of all workers on May Day, these spineless Sertuc bureaucrats opted for a tame festival, *a la* Eurocommunists of the 1970s. This year again, there is a festival. The festival will no doubt be a tired, staid 'official movement' affair without a spark of working class militancy: the march, on the other hand, will be a different matter. We must ensure that again it will be dominated politically and numerically by Leninists from Britain and Turkey. We aim this year to again be the largest British contingent. This will be a powerful blow against the forces that have usurped the title of 'communist' in this country. Rally under the banners *The Leninist*, 10.30am Highbury Fields, (Highbury and Islington tube), Monday May 1.

Hands off Ireland! is gathering momentum. Regular street work is being done by our supporters in many parts of London. And there is a healthy take up of HoI! leaflets, petitions and draft trade union resolutions from around the country. Now HoI is organising regular meetings in London, under the theme of 'Which way solidarity?' with a wide range of invited speakers, and a fundraising social is due to take place on April 1. Recently, John Mitchell, the sacked Idiotu secretary (see centre pages) has also sponsored the campaign, and in late April to early May, Hands off Ireland! is staging a national speaking tour with him as a main speaker. This will be an important tour, providing the opportunity to both develop links between militants in Ireland and Britain and build an effective anti-imperialist campaign for Irish self determination. This is all being done with scarce resources. That is why HoI needs the assistance of readers and supporters of *The Leninist*. If you can help in any way with its work, get in touch with Hands off Ireland! at BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX or phone (01) 431 3135. Build the resistance!

No backhanders



The paper of the Euro Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain, the deadly *7 Days*, recently whined that the East German government 'only' took 20 copies of each issue. Of course, this is not the only socialist country that hands the no-hoppers of official communism in Britain hidden subsidies for their ailing rags in the form of bulk orders. Tot up the total number of copies of *7 Days* going to Eastern Europe and the USSR and you come up with a substantial proportion of their circulation. These backhanders not only illustrate the fact that the Euros around *7 Days* and the centrists around the *Morning Star* are despicable parasites who live off the backs of workers in the socialist countries: it also underlines the fact that they are totally useless to the working class in this country. A genuine Communist Party will not be built without hard work and sacrifice, including financial sacrifice.

Communism and nationalism

WHERE IS Sinn Fein going? This is no mere academic question. The resistance to the British occupation of the Six Counties has been led by the republican movement for two decades. Understanding what is going on in Sinn Fein is therefore of real importance for us, not least because the Irish revolution has such a profound impact on political life in Britain. For communists in Britain, a genuine communist party cannot be built, socialist revolution cannot be achieved, without a relentless struggle against imperialism's oppression of the Irish people and the fight to build a mass working class movement demanding troops out now.

That is why we communists do not join in with the chauvinist chorus sung by diverse British 'socialists', condemning the armed resistance of the IRA as 'individual terrorism', taking in effect a neutralist stand between British imperialism and Irish anti-imperialists. In reality there is no middle ground in the Irish war. We must stand for the IRA and against the British army.

But while we unconditionally support the anti-imperialist struggle of Sinn Fein and the IRA, we in no way paint them red. This approach was warned against by Lenin at the second congress of the Communist International: there was, he said, a "need for a determined struggle against attempts to give a communist colouring to bourgeois democratic liberation trends" (CW, Vol 31, p149). This is in essence what the republican movement is. We do not use this in a derisory sense, but in a scientific one.

Irish republicanism's historic roots, its evolution and, most importantly, its effective programme, define it as such. When the republican movement leaders call themselves socialists we do not in any way question the sincerity of their statements. But their socialism is not the scientific socialism of Marx, Engels and Lenin but the eclectic petty bourgeois socialism of left nationalism. The stance taken on such issues as abortion and the relationship between the socialist and bourgeois democratic tasks of the revolution testify to this.

Sinn Fein's ard fheis (conference) in late January is a crystallisation of the principles, strategy and tactics of republicanism at this time. The ard fheis took place against the backdrop of IRA moves towards 'cleaning up its act'; fighting to minimise civilian deaths and actions which alienate the republican movement's support. Hence the disbandment of an IRA active service unit judged to be too indiscriminate in its actions.

Obviously, this is understandable. But we must make clear that the blame for *all* deaths in the Irish war – whether the deaths of combatants or in such events as the Enniskillen bomb – lies with British imperialism. Statements by leaders of the republican movement cannot be used as an excuse for anti-imperialists to be selective in their support for the armed struggle.

It was the debate around motion 37 and the document *Towards a mass movement*, however, which was perhaps the most important facet of the ard fheis. This, the question of a 'pan-nationalist' strategy, has provoked much debate among Irish anti-imperialists. Sinn Fein's paper *An Phoblacht/Republican News* described it thus: "The starting point for such a movement was the acceptance of several premises, including the obvious need for such a movement, the centrality of the national question and the need for imperialism to be confronted by the broadest possible range of political forces throughout Ireland." (February 2 1989).

What has prompted this has been Sinn Fein's lack of success in establishing a significant level of support in the Twenty-six Counties. But attempting to build an alliance on the basis of all those who formally stand for a united Ireland has dangers.

The governing party in the Twenty-six Counties, Fianna Fail, formally stands for Irish reunification and of course it is necessary to reach out to its supporters. But this cannot be done through chasing after the thoroughly reactionary Fianna Fail. What kind of anti-imperialist 'broad front' can be formed with a party which is tied inextricably to imperialism, to Irish capital and consequently one of the biggest blocks to the rights of the people and Irish freedom?

Such an alliance will lead Sinn Fein members into such retrogressive actions as detailed by John Mitchell (see opposite). Rather than reaching out to forces in the south living in poverty or forced to emigrate, as Gerry Adams promised at the ard fheis, it will lead to compromises with those who prosper on the basis of pauperising the masses.

This is recognised by some republicans. John White, a delegate at the ard fheis, warned that the document would lead to an alliance with reactionaries and that adoption of the resolution would "dilute" socialist policies in Sinn Fein.

A 'broad front' with anti-socialist, anti-working class forces like Fianna Fail cannot but lead to such a situation. The adoption of motion 37 seems to move Sinn Fein towards pragmatic constitutional nationalism.

This has always been implicit within the republican movement which, though its actions in the Six Counties are revolutionary, has a reformist attitude to the Twenty-six, as we can see from this IRA Army Council statement from 1987: "The IRA offers no threat to the Twenty-six Counties other than the change which would occur anyway, whosoever brought it about, between the transition from a Twenty-six County state to a Thirty-two County state." (AP/RN, December 3 1987).

The decisions taken at the ard fheis are a logical outcome of a stance which has always been – to say the least – ambivalent on the south. Irish republicanism, like all petty bourgeois revolutionary trends, has seen many vacillations and worse throughout its long history. As we have argued, this is not an excuse to abstain from solidarity with the struggle for Irish freedom which the republican movement leads. But, like in every other country, it does pose the need for the leadership of the revolution by a genuine communist party.

Back in 1986 I wrote that; "Although the most militant – indeed revolutionary – sections of the working class are organised in the republican movement, it would be criminal to think Sinn Fein will go towards communism in the same way as Castro's July 26 Movement did in Cuba. To revolutionary republican workers in Ireland we must say that no blind faith can be placed in such a process; it needs a conscious expression, the Communist Party addressing itself to these tasks." (The Leninist, December 4 1986).

This statement has been borne out by not only the dominant political line in Sinn Fein, but also by developments in this milieu subsequently: the open identification of many republicans, especially POWs, with Marxism, in such publications as *Questions of History* (see The Leninist December 27 1987); the birth of the League of Communist Republicans and of the declaration by the IRSP of the need for a communist party (see the reviews page of this issue). And alongside this you also have militants like John Mitchell who state the same. Whether any existing trend in Ireland today has the ability to actually carry this out, we cannot say. But the potential is there, now greater than ever.

What is needed is the line of march mapped out by Lenin at the Comintern's second congress: "the Communist International should support the bourgeois democratic movements in colonial and backward countries only on condition that, in these countries, the elements of future proletarian parties, which will be communist not only in name, are brought together and trained to understand their special tasks, i.e. those of the struggle against the bourgeois democratic movements within their own nations. The Communist International must enter into temporary alliances with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but must not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the proletarian movement even in its most embryonic form" (CW, Vol 31, p150).

That is the case no matter how revolutionary, how heroic the bourgeois, or petty bourgeois, democratic movement. The only way to national liberation in Ireland is through the struggle for a communist party and for socialism.

- For the IRA – against the British Army!
- For genuine communist parties in Ireland and Britain!

Alan Merrik

Ireland -- W

David Rhys talked to John Mitchell, Trade Union, about his fight for rei party in Ireland



John Mitchell in London on Bloody Sunday

Which way forward?

Sacked general secretary of the Irish Distributive and Administrative statement, pan-nationalism and the question of building a communist

What is the background of your sacking by the Idatu executive?

In the first place I'll admit I was taken by surprise. We had a conference at Easter which had a very high profile on the national question. Everything seemed to be going very well. Three weeks later I was suspended for not cancelling a meeting with Gerry Adams speaking.

This, along with my original suspension from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions two years back and my criticisms of northern unions, were discussed at three consecutive meetings.

At the last one they tried to throw me out of the meeting and I wouldn't go. Phil Flynn [a Sinn Fein member on the ICTU Executive] then asked me to go. We only subsequently found out when we took it to court that Flynn had seconded my suspension.

Flynn is playing an amazing role. He's one of the architects of this national plan of collaboration. He's been appointed by Haughey to what I think is called an 'efficiency committee' to make the civil service more efficient; in other words, to screw the public service workers. At the same time he's still a member of Sinn Fein. I regard this as an act of treachery on his part. I think a lot of Sinn Fein members on the ground would agree.

During the anti-extradition campaign, where the Sinn Fein leadership did not want to have a high profile because they didn't want to embarrass Fianna Fail, I spoke at a lot of meetings and had a lot of Sinn Fein activists coming up to me and supporting me. I think a lot of them are very shocked by Flynn's behaviour.

What do you think of Sinn Fein's current stance?

They have this big ambition to get into the 'mainstream' again. I'm obviously a bit of an embarrassment because I criticise unions in the north and so on. Idatu was the only union in the country criticising the national plan, and actually embarrassing it, by getting twice the pay rise that the national plan was giving the workers.

When Sinn Fein were trying to make their peace with Fianna Fail, it obviously wasn't any help if I was criticising Fianna Fail. But they are very confused at the moment. They are trying to make their peace with Fianna Fail and the SDLP and they got spurned. They are saying now that all parties in favour of a united Ireland should get together. Adams admits that Sinn Fein cannot free Ireland on their own. But they're not going to free Ireland with the help of Fianna Fail.

If they are looking for allies, what about people on the left and the unemployed? There must be about 60% who don't bother to vote in the south.

How did your reinstatement campaign go?

Given our resources it was incredibly successful. It was mostly Dublin based shop stewards who ran it. We also got support from Dundalk and Drogheda, Cork, Limerick etc. But with the structure of Idatu, as we didn't carry the two biggest branches – that's Cork and Dublin – then we had no hope.

There was a massive campaign of intimidation by the executive. Two union officials who represented me when I was sacked were told they couldn't do so any more. They and others were told that if they assisted me, directly or indirectly, then they would be sacked; activists who supported me were told that they would be expelled from the union. Some of the big store owners went round and said "you're not to support this guy". But everywhere I spoke I got support. There was a chance, but it's very hard to beat the union machine.

You mentioned to us before the possibility of splitting Idatu. Won't you just be handing over the official structures, within Idatu and the union movement as a whole, to the sitting

executives?

That does seem to be a fact of life. As I didn't get back, it's quite probable that many left officials and ordinary members will leave anyway, and Idatu will turn into what it was like before, ie fairly right wing. If there is enough demand from the members for a new union, then we'd have to consider that. But obviously I would have preferred to get back and continue the fight within the union.

Most of the employers won't recognise a new union. You have to have strength just to get people to talk to you, and that is a difficult thing to do. I won't romanticise about a new union with a mass membership. It would be quite small initially. I think we could force recognition because anyone who joined the new union would know what they were joining and would be pretty militant.

What could help us here is a merger between Idatu and the two big unions, the Workers Union and the Transport Union. There will be a lot of people who will not want to be in a big, pro-employer business union. If there was another union around with a proven track record, then they might be attracted towards that.

But how do you start to address workers in the big unions? We would look to the lessons of the communist led National Minority Movement of the '20s in Britain, which started as a revolutionary opposition within the South Wales Miners Federation and then quickly spread throughout the whole union movement, being a key force in the 1926 General Strike. That sort of organisation allows you to link militants throughout the trade unions and coordinate action on that basis.

Actually, that was one of the plans that we never got to put into effect. One thing we discussed within the left in Idatu was setting up an organisation, with the principles of accepting independence from the employers and independence from the two statelets. It could possibly still be done, separate from setting up a new union or along with it. Where that would lead, I don't know, but it could be interesting.

Many of the links already exist. When I first got involved in trade union politics in the early '70s there was a national shop stewards committee against wage agreements. I was secretary of it. The first meeting after I was sacked a lot of the old guys from the '70s came back. There are a lot of people around who are pissed off by politics and trade unions and won't go to meetings. They could be regenerated by something like that.

One thing that we see in Ireland at the moment, and which many in Ireland see too, is a lack of a communist party. Do you think there is the need and potential for this, and where and how can it be built?

I think the need for a party exists, maybe stronger than ever. A lot of people say there is a need for a new party. Sinn Fein, with its links with nationalism, doesn't seem to be interested in that any more. I used to be a member of the Labour Party and even, briefly, a member of the Sticks [Workers Party]. I don't think they can be changed from within.

There are sufficient forces, north and south, to set up a new party. When we tried it before one of our big weaknesses was that while we had a pretty good spread of republicans and lefties in the south we had no power base in the north.

If another attempt is made – and another attempt will be made – there will be a base in the north. Now you have the League of Communist Republicans and others like the IRSP. They are somewhat discredited because of their past, even though what they are saying seems to make sense. There is a constituency in the north now that would be prepared to link up with the south and form a new Marxist vanguard party. That's needed and it can be

done.

How do you think you get that then? For instance, one thing which has been put forward is the LCR's idea of a new Republican Congress.

My argument against the congress idea was that if you have what they called an alliance of Fenians and socialists, the Fenians have their organisation – Sinn Fein – but the socialists don't. When you have a socialist organisation I would be happy to sit down with radical republicans and maybe have common action.

There are informal talks going on at the moment with a view to setting up a party, but they are still at a very early stage. I don't want to name any forces yet, though it's quite wide ranging. There are all sorts of people – northerners, southerners, trade union people, all claiming to be Marxist – trying to work out a new party.

In formal terms we would say that what the IRSP is saying is correct, that Ireland needs its *Iskra*, a theoretically advanced polemical paper to fight these questions out publicly. There are dangers with groups getting together in a smoke filled room, deciding that they all agree with Marxism-Leninism, national and social liberation and world revolution, and there it is; we have a new party. I wouldn't rule out the smoke filled room where we can argue things out privately. I'm not in the business of entertaining people through public debates. There will still be differences, but there will possibly be enough common ground to form a party. But I think we have got to have those discussions in private.

The people I am talking with at the minute are from three or four organisations, none of which are of any political significance. If one organisation emerges then we'll go public. Hopefully we can extend the discussion to other groups.

How do you think the emergence of a genuine communist party in Ireland, even if only a small one initially, would affect politics there?

It would have a dramatic effect. I think it should shy away from the charade of taking part in elections. That's not really our ball-game until we achieve a much bigger mass party. If you can win disputes, get involved in all these jungles where there's no housing, save people being evicted, be involved in strikes organically and at the same time having a presence and view on the north that is consistent and honest, then that at least would be different.

You do have a problem in the north, where there is still virtually unquestioning support for Sinn Fein and the IRA in most of the Catholic areas that I know of.

That surely is because there is no real opposition. People there were telling us that when groups like the Socialist Workers Movement – the SWP's Irish clone – and other petty bourgeois revolutionaries go around selling their papers, they can't confront the question that it is all very well to attack the republican movement but, practically, what have they got as an alternative. How do you develop a truly national revolution?

In many ways the best time for these arguments is now. There are half a million unemployed in the whole island, with maybe 50,000 a year emigrating. All the right wing arguments about getting inflation down and you'll get jobs if the climate is right have been proven to be wrong. And then there's the national debt: I've found myself alone in arguing against paying the national debt. Capitalism has never more patently failed than at the moment.

Why do think that Sinn Fein has not taken up these issues?

The name Sinn Fein has always been a problem in the south. I think it was in its interest to enter into a coalition between itself and a new radical party there. But it is just going to be

seen by the poor now as another version of Fianna Fail.

It really has no policy on the cuts or anything. How can you go onto an unemployed housing estate in Dublin and say to people, 'support the armed struggle, ourselves and Fianna Fail'? You could go to them and say that the money that could get you a hospital bed is the money being spent on maintaining that border or paying a debt that you didn't incur, then people would be more likely to listen to you.

I don't really see a great future for Sinn Fein at the moment in the south. In the north they have a major problem, because they can't just disown their people.

The other thing that I've argued with Sinn Fein is that their constituency is basically a working class one. They have no particular attachment to 'the four green fields' or some Celtic twilight. I think radical politics would actually be quite acceptable to them. People there are not going to accept a conservative society; they've always been anti-establishment.

What is your estimation of the solidarity movement in Britain?

I was asked to support 'Time To Go' and I wouldn't. 'Time To Go' implies that there was a time to be there. It also sounds to me like a Labour Party manifesto and equally as pointless.

If they got to power they wouldn't do anything about it. I don't have a lot of faith in that.

It's going to be the Irish working class who liberate Ireland. The British working class could help their own liberation by helping us to liberate us. The more advanced you are the easier it will be for us and the more support we get from you the further down the road you are to your own revolution.

We would agree with that. That is why we launched Hands off Ireland!, which will build an anti-imperialist contingent on the 'Time to Go' demonstration and yet challenge its pro-imperialist politics.

Well, I'd be worried that a contingent like that on their march would not be distinguished from them enough. When the British gutter press reported it, they certainly would make no such distinction. Could you not do the same thing by just turning up at the end, selling papers, leafleting and talking to people. I would be worried about giving it any credibility.

But this demonstration will mobilise a lot of workers. They might be turning out under the wrong slogans, but it is important that an alternative be there to challenge them and give answers. We think we can be a significant force there. One of the reasons that there are so few people involved in revolutionary politics is that it doesn't come over as a serious force. We think that we can present Hands off Ireland! as a serious alternative and make a real impact with genuine anti-imperialist politics.

I still have reservations but in the spirit of comradeship I'll sponsor Hands off Ireland! and give as much help as I can. Ireland deserves a mass solidarity movement in Britain.

Support Hands Off Ireland! Order Hands Off Ireland folders at £1 per 100, from HOI, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX



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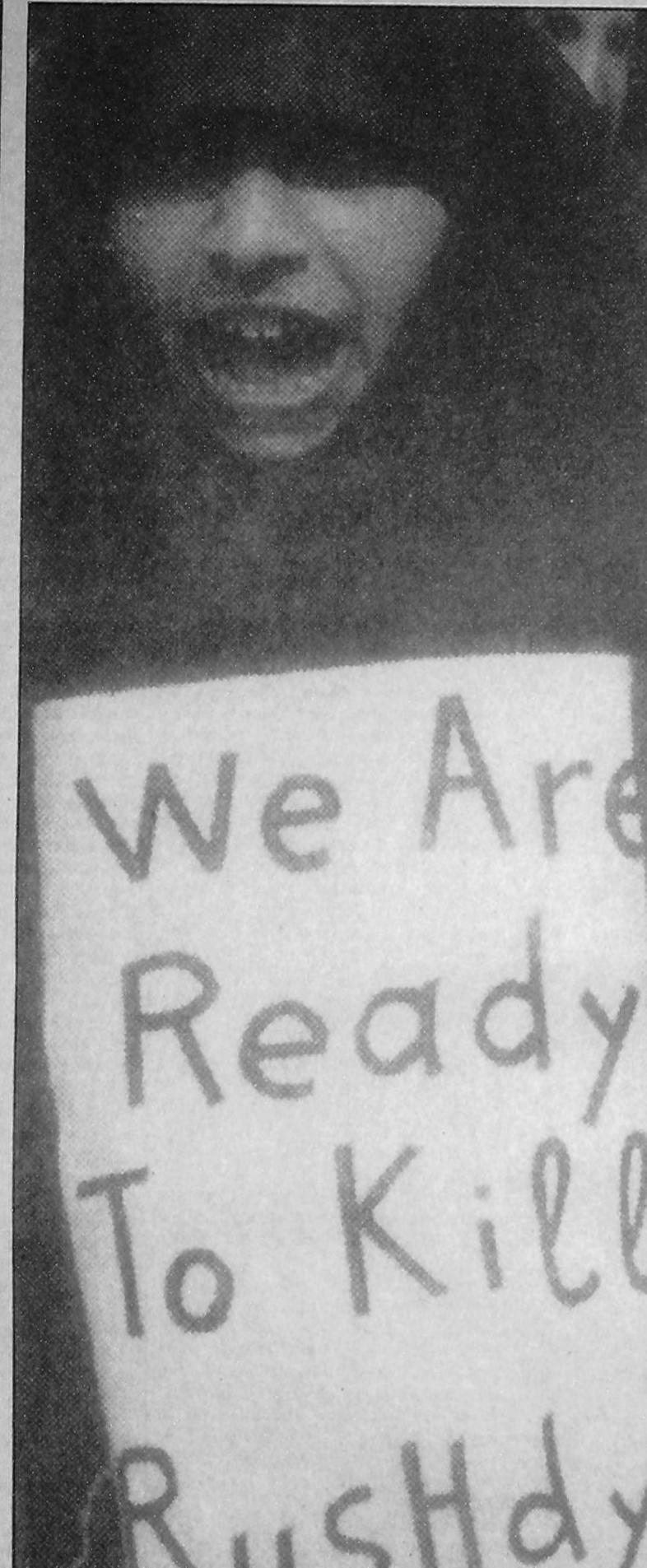
RUSHDIE

Godly reaction

The best, most consistent Gorbachevists are the Eurocommunists. Their weekly rag, 7 Days once more showed this by its front page article on Afghanistan in the issue of February 11. Hafizullah Amin, leader of the April 1978 revolution, is condemned as a "ruthless and bloodstained thug", as is his Soviet installed replacement, Babrak Karmal. It goes on to report that "the tentacles of terror" are tightening around Kabul. Now why might that be? Could it be that, after crippling the revolution led by Amin, the Soviets have now deserted it, leaving it to the black reaction of the mujahedin? One wonders how long it will be before these liberals are also damning other revolutionaries, like Lenin, as "ruthless and bloodstained thugs".

While the 'official communists' play at Pontius Pilates over the Afghanistan sellout, some leftists are relishing it. Just so with the cold war 'socialists' around the Labourite Socialist Organiser. They welcome the withdrawal of their 'Great Satan' as "the 'progress' that Moscow has wanted to impose on Afghanistan was at best one of jails, a police state, and bureaucratic dictatorship." What a nice, well reasoned bourgeois argument. What about workers' rights, women's rights, religious freedom, and the destruction of feudal barbarism, to mention just a few examples of the progress that the Soggies won't see?

And word reaches the Leninist office that there are still some places left on the contingent of the Partisan Defence Committee (an international front for the Trotskyite International Spartacist Tendency) preparing to do battle with the murderous mujahedin in Afghanistan. We kid you not. In early February, their American organisation wrote to the Afghan government offering "to organise an international brigade to fight to the death in defense of [democratic] rights in Afghanistan." This type of cynical posturing is all very easy to organise from the Bronx or some such place, (particularly so when there is not a snowball's chance in hell that the government in Kabul will take up the offer). But it cuts little ice with real partisans of the Afghan revolution. The Sparts refused to even acknowledge that there actually was a revolution in that country: now it seems, they are trying to gain some 'militant' credibility from what could well prove to be its death throes.



How do we combat Islamic reaction

IT IS seldom that a book gives rise to such controversy. While 2,000 anti-imperialists demonstrated for Irish freedom in north London on January 28, 8,000 moslems gathered to burn copies of Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* in the city centre and voice support for Khomeini's edict sentencing Rushdie to death. This, quite understandably, has sent Rushdie into hiding under armed guard.

While Khomeini and the Iranian mullahs make a virtue of their mediaevilism, many supposedly progressive countries with substantial Islamic populations have banned the book - including Najibullah's government in Afghanistan. And bowing before black reaction has not stopped here.

On February 16 came the announcement that the Federal German publishers of the book were backing out, supposedly out of

consideration for their staff (more likely the directors of the publishing house were concerned to save their own skins given the "arrows aimed at the hearts" of anyone to do with publishing it). They are merely the latest in a long line of publishers. The same goes for the retailers. When WH Smiths in Bradford removed Rushdie's book from the shelves it looked like the start of a trend. It has been. Although *Satanic Verses* has shot to the top of the best seller list and sold out in numerous bookshops, many leading retailers have not put in new orders.

Why has there been such controversy over this book? It is hardly because of its attacks on Islam. Read any Christian book of theology - not least those published by fundamentalist groups - and you will find the profit of Allah being branded as a devil. Rushdie is merely being irreverent. No, what lies

desperate attempt of Islamic reactionaries to turn back the tide of history.

In Iran Khomeini is using the whole affair for distinctly political purposes; backing the Hezbollah ultra reactionaries against the so-called moderates (ie slightly less ultra reactionaries) around president Khamenei. Yet it has not only been Shia moslems who have supported Khomeini's call to murder Rushdie. The majority of Sunni leaders have been just as vocal (this is like the bishop of Rome backing Ian Paisley). What these forces fear is secularisation and assimilation.

By whipping up a hysteria against Rushdie the mullahs are able to put themselves forward as the defenders of the family, the state and tradition in countries like Pakistan; and where they are in a minority with the help of state racism, police harassment and discrimination the mosque is able to wall off moslems and hold back assimilation and create a so-called moslem community.

In Britain, among the Asian moslem population, the hold of the reactionary Islamic clergy has undoubtedly been strengthened as a result of the campaign against *Satanic Verses*. The bourgeois press has, with great relish, reported the widespread agreement among ordinary Asian moslems in Britain with Khomeini's edict.

The radical figures who emerged in the seventies around such issues as the defence of the Bangladeshi community in Brick Lane have been mainly been 'quangoised' or brought back into the moslem fold.

This and the fact that the working class movement has in the main completely failed to defend the rights of the Asian moslem population has left the field open for the mosque to assert its hegemony. The last thing the petty bourgeois priesthood wants is for 'their people' to be Anglicised, ie secularised and divided along class lines. If this were to happen their power would evaporate and they would face a future of older and older, and smaller and smaller congregations. It is to stop that happening that these religious King Canutes have turned on Rushdie.

In recent years they have fought tooth and nail to make the mosque the centre of gravity of day to day life of moslems in Britain. They have already had some success in dragging children into single sex evening classes. Subject to corporal punishment, the children are forced to learn the Koran by rote. This keeps moslem youth off the streets and under the thumb of the reactionary Imams.

To build on this success the mosque has been damned as ungodly multiracial, mixed sex schools - which, whatever their liberal 'multiculturalist' limitations, have facilitated the integration of moslem youth into mainstream British culture.

In our view integration is a good thing. Separatism can only strengthen reaction in the moslem community, which leaves it outside the ranks of the workers' movement and easy prey for fascist propaganda and attack.

With this in mind there is no excuse for turning a blind eye to the growth of Islamic reaction in Britain. Those, such as the RCP - which in 1987 marched with Islamic reactionaries in protest at the US bombing of Libya - and whose leader said in its paper that there is no Islamic fundamentalism in Bri-

tain, are on a dangerous road at the end of which we can see the *News Line* sect. Its support for Khomeini's attacks on *Satanic Verses* speaks volumes about where political prostitution leads.

The million strong Asian moslem population in Britain is an important force for revolution or reaction. It cannot be won to revolution by playing to its prejudices. The power of the backlash against *Satanic Verses* proves that communists must challenge these prejudices.

Of course, as well as fighting Islamic reaction we must direct most of our energy against the main agent of separatism: the racist British state. *Satanic Verses* is being used as 'proof' of one of its favourite myths - that all Arabs and Asians are fundamentalist nutcases and terrorists who, if given the chance, will abuse the 'privilege' of residing in this bastion of civilisation. There is a section of bourgeois thought which would also extend this to Rushdie himself: after all, was it not this foreigner's book responsible for messing up Britain's carefully planned courtship of Iran?

Unfortunately we find the *Morning Star* playing the bosses game. In its front page article of February 15 the paper rants against the "fanatical moslem dictator Ayatollah Khomeini". And in the name of "civilised opinion" - ie the reactionary, racist bourgeois state - its editorial calls upon Britain to "make the strongest possible protest to Iran". (This rag supported Khomeini in his repression of revolutionary and democratic forces in Iran until 1982!)

This 'official communist' paper which supports immigration controls, community policing and the like can only offer bourgeois platitudes. It cannot win the Asian population away from Islam and to revolution. It only fosters illusions in the benign nature of the bourgeois state.

Other sections of 'official communism' show the same signs of disintegration. One example was a letter which appeared in the *Independent* of February 17 by one Inayatullah Zaigham who commends Khomeini's edict. We understand that Zaigham is a member of the Eurocommunist CPGB!

The Labourites have similar problems. In Bradford some of its leading members have lined up with the bookburners. And taking their cue from the mullahs Labour MPs Bernie Grant and Max Madden have called for the extension of the mediaevil blasphemy laws to cover all religions, not just the Christian cult.

In the cynical interest of retaining their substantial Asian moslem vote these two demagogues are campaigning to hand the state a very dangerous weapon. The blasphemy laws, like all other forms of censorship, are used to repress dissent from the norms decided by the capitalist class. Inevitably they are turned on the working class and the oppressed. After all the greatest blasphemy is Marxism-Leninism!

We say our class enemy must not under any circumstances be allowed to decide what we see or hear. Whether it be proscribing *The Life of Brian*, Sinn Fein, page three pin-ups or *Satanic Verses*, the point is the same.

- Abolish the blasphemy laws and all censorship!
- There must be freedom to combat religion as well as freedom of religion!
- No immigration controls. Equal citizenship rights for all!
- Organise Workers' Defence Corps to smash racist attacks!
- To fight racism we must fight the racist state!

Sean Quinn

Better late

Irish Republican Socialist Party, An Camchácta/Starry Plough, No4, 40p, pp12

ALL FRIENDS of Irish liberation will agree that the time between *Starry Plough* number three and four has been overlong. Nevertheless, that there have been four editions at all is an achievement in itself.

Throughout the first half of the 1980s the IRSP was in crisis. It suffered not only from vicious state attacks and frameups, but one internal schism after another. The IRSP was left depleted, demoralised, disorientated... and without any sort of national press. The end seemed near when the Irish Peoples Liberation Organisation was formed and announced it was going to settle its differences with the IRSP by physically wiping it out.

It survived. Indeed, with our encouragement it declared its intention of breaking with left nationalism and laying the basis for a genuine Communist Party in Ireland. We argued that the means to this end was a paper like *The Leninist*, ie a paper engaging in open ideological struggle aimed at politically advanced workers. The first edition of *Starry Plough* appeared in early 1988.

Of course, as the IRSP would be the first to admit, it can hardly carry out its tasks if *Starry Plough* is not published often enough to build up the momentum of debate. To say the least, there are lengthy pauses for thought.

The communist paper must, like *Iskra*, develop a continuing critique of the existing trends in the revolutionary movement in Ireland. *Starry Plough* ought to be frequent enough to carry out a continuing polemic with its main rival/opponent, the republican movement and its paper *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. Yet it does not appear often enough to even roundly take on Ireland's somnolent Trotskyist clones. The most exciting smell for revolutionaries is that of a freshly printed paper: the IRSP must do its utmost to indulge in this pleasure more often.

Che Guevara once wrote that the revolution arms itself. Revolutionaries must not rely on existing resources — they are never enough. They must use initiative to produce what is needed, not what seems 'possible'. Che's military dictum must be applied politically.

If one cannot raise the funds to publish a weekly paper, even under illegal or semi-legal circumstances, then one can hardly expect to smash the bourgeoisie. Formally, we are sure that the IRSP comrades would agree. But the infrequent publication of the paper indicates a practical approach which is at variance with this. And it is practice which counts.

This problem is reflected to some extent in an article by comrade Francis Glenn on Hands off Ireland! Comrade Glenn raises some criticisms of the way in which the campaign was set up.

In matters of procedure and interpretation, we have expressed our view elsewhere, and there is little point in giving a blow by blow re-run: we can only say again that *The Leninist* acted in a perfectly principled way.

Comrade Glenn laments the fact that half of the diverse small left groups which turned up to the initial meetings of Hands off Ireland! have now gone their own way. This, we agree, is little cause for celebration. But Glenn correctly states that "a deadlock" had been reached.

We argued for an anti-imperial-

ist contingent on August's 'Time to Go' demonstration united around the fundamental demands 'troops out now' and 'self determination for the Irish people'. For one reason or another, groups like the RCG, Workers Power and the RDG, were not able to vote for this.

So be it, we said. And precisely because, as comrade Glenn says, "time is of the essence", we called for and got a vote on the founding statement of Hands off Ireland!

Not to have done so, in the interests of 'left unity', would have been a recipe for inactivity. If we are serious about solidarity on a principled basis, then we can hardly wait around for ever — and that is how long it would have taken — to reach agreement. What is needed is practice!

Comrade Glenn's short article could be interpreted as being an attempt to smooth certain ruffled leftist feathers. This would be diplomatic internationalism and not worthy of an organisation like the IRSP. Of course, the IRSP has every right to criticise us. We note — but do not accept — its criticism and we take it in the spirit of the comrades' support of *our struggle* to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Thus we wholeheartedly welcome the IRSP's support — albeit with ifs and buts — for Hands off Ireland!

As our Irish friends will be aware, lack of unity among left groups in Britain cannot be an excuse for failing to carry out necessary political work.

Principled left unity in action will only come about when the Leninist CPGB is able to exert hegemony. Clearly this is not the case today and it certainly will not come about by attempts to cobble together diverse leftists. What is required is the ideological and political victory of Leninism.

But back to *Starry Plough*. The litmus test of any revolutionary paper is its letters page. Lack of one would reveal a dead internal life and complete lack of impact. One which gives no room for debate would point to an ostrich like political mentality. But the letters page of *Starry Plough* is encouraging. This edition carries a lively response to the questions raised in the paper and this bodes well for its future.

And while *Starry Plough* suffers from a certain eclecticism, this is no bad thing at this stage of the IRSP's evolution. There must be a sorting out of ideas, the contention of different views is healthy. Comrade Glenn draws on the work of the Communist Party of Turkey's R. Yurukoglu and our own comrade Jack Conrad and does a workmanlike demolition of his own comrade Robert Lake's dismissive attitude towards the Soviet Union. Glenn correctly argues that its socialist gains are real and must be defended; not least against Gorbachev.

One of the most interesting articles in the latest issue is penned by the abovementioned comrade Lake. 'Marxism and the broad front' is a polemic directed mainly against the League of Communist Republicans and their call for a new republican congress. It is also a critique of the IRSP's founding cardinal strategy of the 'broad front' and of the 'official communist' movement's popular front.

Comrade Lake rightly emphasises the centrality of the party: "The primary task must be to organise the revolutionary socialists of this country into an efficient and effective fighting machine. A socialist party needs to be built. In advance of this, however, debate must occur. Nothing can be built without a base... Theoretical clarity is the basis of every Marxist organisation. Without this clarity there is no real

communist logic in the work of an organisation."

What Ireland needs is not a "socialist party" but a Communist Party. But on the question of organisation and theoretical clarity comrade Lake is spot on. This cannot be said on other questions. There is a tendency to throw the baby out with the bathwater. His statement that "for Marxists it should be a united workers' front or nothing" is profoundly wrong and precisely shows a lack of theoretical clarity.

The fourth congress of the Communist International advocated the anti-imperialist united front, which was an alliance between communist parties and bourgeois and petty bourgeois revolutionary forces in the oppressed countries. This, with the forging of an effective communist party, would be a valuable weapon in the armoury of the working class in Ireland.

Having said this, though, comrade Lake's article is a worthwhile contribution to the developing debate on revolutionary strategy in Ireland. Through such articles and the development of their paper the IRSP comrades can determine the political agenda in Ireland. They are quite right to say that the key to the future lies in the building of a genuine Communist Party in Ireland. To put this task at the heart of Irish politics demands far more frequent publication. We wish the comrades well.

Alan Merrik

Stillborn

Communist Party of Britain, Communist Review No2, Winter 1989, pp28, £1

"BY THEIR deeds shall ye know them", it says in the bible. But this opportunist grouping of *Morning Star* followers which claims to have "re-established" the Communist Party in April 1988 has done so little in its near year of existence that we are obliged to judge it by what it has not done. "Britain has a Communist Party again" say its advertisements, but far from the Communist Party being reborn, the CPB's lack of activity fully justifies our description of its foundation as a reformist still birth.

Since then the CPB has organised small contingents on the national Anti-Apartheid Movement and a few other demonstrations, produced one heavily censored congress report and two issues of its "theoretical and discussion journal", *Communist Review*, its only official publication — which is supposed to be quarterly but has only come out at five-month intervals. Hardly an example of revolutionary dynamism.

The lack of life in the CPB is confirmed by the fact that its journal contains not a single letter and has no mention whatsoever of any action or campaign carried out by the 'party', nor of anything planned.

According to the journal's predecessor, *Communist Campaign Review*, it was the job of a genuine communist party to generate "mass extra-parliamentary struggle" so that a left Labour government could get elected (according to these 'official communists' we do not need a revolution to win socialism). Now that the 'party' has been 're-established' there is no mention of the tasks of a communist party. In fact, the editorial, while lamenting the fact that the Labour Party leadership opposes the building of "a united, mass extra-parliamentary struggle involving ordinary working people in political action on the issues most affecting them", fails

to even mention the CPB.

Evidently the editors — Ron Bellamy, Ray Colvin and now, Tony Chater (the faith, hope and banker of the hapless CPB) — implicitly recognise that what they are leading is, in reality, not a party at all, and is certainly incapable of mobilising any 'masses'. It follows, therefore, that the Labour leadership must be persuaded to do the job.

Instead of organising to generate mass struggle, the CPB is already falling into a *Marxism Today* type role of think tank and advisor to the Labour Party and British imperialism in turn. Labour ought to do this, the government ought to do that. The journal is addressed to Labour Party leaders and trade union tops, instead of setting tasks for its own members and supporters.

This is graphically illustrated when it comes to the question of the unemployed. "There is an urgent need" says its editorial "for a mass based movement of the unemployed". But instead of outlining what the CPB — which claims to be 2,000 strong — is going to do, there is mere verbiage. Instead of getting out onto the streets to win the raw material for setting up organisations of the unemployed, ie militant unemployed workers, the CPB gives yet another one of its pathetic publicity puffs for the TUC's politically straightjacketed tea and ping pong unemployed centres.

Although these centres have been rapidly closing one after the other, although their main function when they were open seemed to have been to provide second rate bureaucrats with work and the local left with cheap meeting rooms, the editors claim to detect "signs, albeit on a small scale, in the recent activities of the unemployed centres, that attempts are being made to mobilise young people out of work."

What lies behind the CPB's strange faith in these dead or dying bodies is the fact that the CPB's leaders are haunted and humiliated by the successful work of *The Leninist* and the Unemployed Workers Charter. Where they wait for the trade union bureaucracy to take the lead, we are actually organising unemployed workers: last year the UWC staged the largest lobby of the TUC seen since the miners' Great Strike.

The CPB is incapable of telling the truth about the totally discredited unemployed centres or anything else. It is incapable of building the new National Unemployed Workers Movement we are fighting for, or providing any sort of communist leadership. The fact of the matter is that the *Morning Star* and the CPB's forerunner, the Communist Campaign Group, only began to pay lip service to the

idea of organising the unemployed after — and because — the UWC was launched in 1986.

The main content of *Communist Review* consists of polemicising against *Facing up to the future* — the document intended to facilitate discussion within the Eurocommunist camp as a prelude to re-drafting the utterly reformist and parliamentary *British Road to Socialism* programme. There is nothing wrong with this. But considering the CPB is drafting its own version of the *BRS* it is clear that attacking the Euros is being used to divert from its own divisions over the *BRS* and almost everything else.

Of course, the CPB, because it has the same revisionist method, cannot provide a coherent critique of the *Marxism Today* trend. All it can use to fight the Eurocommunist heresies of yesterday. For example, against the Euros' Keynesian 'New Economic Strategy' the CPBers pose the old 'Alternative Economic Strategy', which is nothing other than a piece of 1970s Keynesianism.

Not surprisingly, given their own divisions, *Communist Review* has nothing to say about Gorbachev, perestroika and glasnost. It merely reproduces a couple of short official soviet articles, but gives no point of view of its own on them. No attempt is made to square the 're-establishment' of the CPB on the basis of 'Marxism-Leninism and class politics' with Gorbachev's 'new thinking' and "moral and ethical norms that are common to all mankind" (*Perestroika* p141).

Likewise, given divisions over Afghanistan, where the desertion of the Soviet Army leaves the revolution in extreme danger of being drowned in its own blood, there is silence. The CPB refuses to face up to disagreements that exist within it and to its crystallising proto factions. Hence it is only to be expected that Ireland, the acid test of internationalism for communists in Britain, is completely ignored. As with the Euros, the CPB backs the liberal 'Time to Go' campaign, but because of the left pretensions of some within its leadership, is unwilling or unable to precisely state where it stands in relation to the armed struggle of the IRA and the demand for troops out now.

All this goes to prove that the CPB is firmly on the same rightward road as the Euros. We say: a plague on both opportunist houses! Those who seriously wish to build a genuine Communist Party must detach themselves from the dying corpse of opportunism and join *The Leninist* in its fight to reforge the CPGB on the basis of its founding principles.

Ian Farrell

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Build the UWC!

Unemployed Organiser

The fourth issue of the UWC's paper, *Unemployed Organiser*, is being received better than any previous issue. Circulation now stands between 8,000-10,000. The breakdown on that circulation figure makes for interesting reading.

Some 2,500 are being posted to individual UWC contacts and trade union/Labour Party branches and other campaigning organisation like the City of London Anti-Apartheid Group or the National Shop Stewards' Combine in the TGWU. That leaves something like 7,500 copies that are being shifted during the course of street activity.

Bulk orders from UWC branches, like London, Manchester and Cardiff, are beginning to pick up as their activity builds in the run up to June 15. At the moment, Manchester UWC stands at the head of the league table with 400 copies. We are pleased with the way that circulation of our UWC paper has taken off and with the growing network that we have been able to build in the course of years of hard work. But there are some very important tasks that face us.

We have set the aim to boost the circulation of our paper to 20,000 by the time of the June 15 action. This will require a tremendous leap in the both the levels and quality of the UWC's street activity and also in our range and numbers of contacts.

With this in mind, the content of *UO* must also develop. Up to now, the paper has in essence been a mobilising bulletin for national actions of the UWC such as our intervention on the Jarrow '86, or our lobbies of the TUC in 1987 and '88. With each paper, we were breaking fresh ground as far as readers and contacts were concerned. This has changed to a certain extent.

Of course, there are still hundreds of thousands of working class people out there who have not yet read the message of the UWC ... and desperately need to. But we also now have more of a solid national core of supporters and sympathisers. Also, the links that we have formed with trade union branches, has started to provide us with a greater volume of information than we ever have had before. Thus, much of the inside information that CPSA branches have provided us both on the state of the cheap labour schemes and battles that they are having with their rightwing over the issue of the introduction of YTS 'trainees' into their workplaces, will in the future be featured in the pages of our paper.

In this way, we will make *UO* not simply a paper that propagates the need for unemployed organisation in general, but through including direct agitational calls and a wider range of more detailed articles a paper that actually organises the unemployed in practice.

On June 15, the Unemployed Workers Charter along with rank and file organisations in the TGWU is coordinating strike action and other protests across the country against the Tories' Employment Training cheap labour scheme. The momentum for the campaign is beginning to pick up as our activists take the UWC's fighting message into the ranks of the unemployed and the broader working class movement.

Trades unions

We have received a good response from every union branch we have approached for support so far in our campaign for action on June 15.

Unsurprisingly, the rank and file of the civil service union have been extremely supportive of the UWC's fight to organise the unemployed. These brothers and sisters are at the sharp end of implementing the government's vicious attacks on the unemployed: they recognise the crying need that exists for mass, militant combat organisation of the unemployed.

The UWC has spoken about the June 15 action to every DoE CPSA branch in London apart from two as well as TGWU organisations, with a long list of other speaking engagements in the pipeline. Without exception, the UWC has received support from these workers' organisations, with pledges of donations and support for the strike action on June 15.

In fact, many union activists have expressed gratitude to the UWC for providing them with an opportunity to do something, to fight back as a workers' organisation against the attacks of the government on the unemployed.

Without the UWC, workers are left to respond as individuals, which is never adequate. A number of CPSA members have asked our representatives "What can I do as an individual? I have to send people on ET - therefore, how can I possibly support strike action against it on June 15? I'd just be a hypocrit!".

We have pointed out that the only way to respond to attacks like ET is through the collective action of workers, both unemployed and employed. After all, the UWC stands against the harassment of claimants that is being stepped up in Job Centres all over the country. Yet we would hardly advise individual unemployed people to re-

fuse to go to compulsory interviews or to rip up the forms they are obliged to fill in. What would be the point of that?

No, we fight for the unemployed to fight back collectively. And the same goes for civil service union workers who have to implement the Tory regulations. That is why June 15 is so important as not simply a day of unemployed protest, but also for employed workers.

Activity

There are a number of public meetings around the country to build for June 15:

•**Cardiff.** Thursday, March 9, Riverside Community Centre, 4 Ninian Park Road - 7.00pm. Speakers - Mark Fischer, UWC National Organiser, and Phil Ward, Cardiff UWC.

•**Manchester.** Thursday, March 23, The Millstone Pub, Thomas Street (off Fib Street, off Piccadilly) - 7.45pm. Speakers - Jack Cummings, Manchester UWC and veteran of the National Unemployed Workers Movement of the 1920s/30s; Mark Fischer, UWC National Organiser; speaker from the National TGWU CP Shop Stewards' Combine.

•**London.** Thursday April 6, Conway Hall (The Club Room) Red Lion Square, WC1 - 7.00pm. Jack Dash, Honorary President UWC and veteran of the National Unemployed Workers Movement; Jeremy Corbyn MP; Mark Fischer; Robert Davies, branch secretary, DoE/DTP Westminster CPSA - in a personal capacity.

Also, there are projected meetings in Glasgow and Mansfield. See the next issue of *UO* for details.

Sales on the streets of *Unemployed Organiser* and the use of the UWC petition are going very well. At our lobby on the TUC in September last year, the TUC refused to accept our 10,000 signature petition against ET from us. Jack

Dash, our Honorary President fired off an angry letter to Willis at the TUC denouncing this insult to the unemployed. We were told in a written reply that we, the unemployed, had "no standing in relation to congress business" and therefore rightly were ignored.

Well, we are determined that this time we will not be put off. We plan to collect some 20,000 signatures and present this to the TUC on the day of June 15 - and underline the determination of the unemployed with strike action in the afternoon.

We have been focusing our signature collection campaign on those employers using ET labour. For example on the food chain Sainsbury's which has trumpeted their support for ET on expensive billboards all over the country. London supporters of the UWC have made special efforts to get the message across to Sainsbury's customers and workers. ... And with great success. As we wrote to one of its managers "we have been receiving a great deal of support from your customers". This was indeed the case on Saturday January 21. In the course of about 4 hours, the UWC collected over 500 of signatures of Sainsbury's customers in Camden and sold hundreds of *Unemployed Organisers*. (To date, we have not yet received a reply from this hapless manager. We await one with interest).

Many people actually asked whether we were calling for a boycott of Sainsbury's until it drops support for this slave labour scheme. At the moment we are not. But, of course, we will not rule it out in advance. Such a tactic is legitimate in the fight to defeat this cynical ET attack on the working class.

If there isn't a Sainsbury's near you, there must be a Wimpy Bar in a busy part of town where many people pass by. Send for petition forms and *Unemployed Organisers*, arm yourselves with the arguments and get out there!

This type of activity is also an excellent way of making contact with potential UWC recruits, especially if you have a meeting or some activity coming up which they can be drawn into, even if it is the next picket. Pulling people towards us, especially those with time on their hands, is essential for the success of June 15.

Enemies

The UWC is making enemies not simply from amongst the ranks of Sainsbury's managers, however. Frank Field, Labour MP for Birkenhead, is trustee of an organisation - Full Employment UK - which has recently advocated the introduction of full-blown 'Workfare', ie work for your dole, into this country.

The UWC was quick to respond. National Organiser Mark Fischer wrote to Mr Field stating that "we were shocked to read of your involvement with Full Employment UK, a ginger group advocating the introduction of a compulsory work-for-dole scheme in this country.

Therefore, I am writing to you to suggest a public debate between our two organisations - preferably between yourself as a Labour MP and myself as National Organiser of the UWC - on the merits of ET/Workfare and on what attitude should be adopted to it by both the unemployed and the trade union movement in general."

The UWC is determined to build a movement that can respond on each and every attack on the unemployed, whether that attack comes from our overt enemies, the Tories, or from those like Mr Field, who profess to be 'friends' of the unemployed.

Battle plan

One particularly important area of work is among homelessness youth. This is something particularly acute in London where many young people have wound up living on the streets and suffering all that that can entail. Much of this has come about through the changes in registration for young unemployed people. The UWC recognises its responsibility for drawing them into the June 15 action. The only alternatives are drugs, prostitution or falling prey to the insidious religious sects.

All in all the battle plan for June 15 is starting to take shape. We have plans for a large scale concert on June 14 to gear comrades up for the next day. Graffiti inspired by the UWC's campaign is starting to appear all over London and news reaches our ears that even more imaginative propaganda actions are being planned.

The June 15 action is taking shape, but as always, we need people to put flesh and sinews onto our plans. And that is where you come in.

Mark Fischer and Tom Cormack